42: Vanoverbergh E-5 (no date) 1936-1938 OA1 Philippines
Apayao OA5
Isneg



The laziness of the Isneg man has become almost proverbial in Apayaw; he resents it of course, but what can be done about it? The Isneg are living in one of the richest provinces of the Philippines agriculturally, and nevertheless these last years, famine has desolated the land at every turn.

Once while at Alumani, I went to visit a few friends: three of them, the father and his two sturdy sons, the older one a widower, the younger one a bachelor, were living together in a house surrounded by the most fertile fields imaginable; and still they complained and said that they were starving to death, because there were no women to till the soil.

The year 1928 was a lean one almost all over the province, but Karagawan men preferred to squat down in their houses and feed on the flowers of the coconut tree rather than come to Kabugaw and earn a ganta (three liters) of rice a day by doing work that could easily be done by boys of twelve years of age: this work was too hard for them.

About the same time I had to go to Bayag, which is some forty miles distant from Kabugaw, a two days' walk. I sent my carriers one day ahead and gave them rations of rice for two days, in order to preclude any excuse for their not reaching their destination at least at the same time as myself. The next day I met the fellows about noon, sitting in a little hut some ten miles from home and cooking their last meal but one. Having rice they did not care for anything else. They had passed a day and a half walking ten miles, cooking rice, chewing betel nut, and . . . resting.

I could adduce a score of examples like this, all from personal experience. But after all why should we blame the Isneg for it? They were reared in years of plenty, when the smallest amount of work brought the largest possible returns; at the beginning of the lean years they consumed all the rice that had been hoarded up for years; and now the hard times have come: when a tree has been growing in a slanting direction for several years, can you make it lean to the other side in its old age? The Bontok Igorot is industrious and always ready to handle a job that may bring him some money; but he is living among rocks and cliffs, where even weeds and grasses refuse to thrive. The Isneg on the contrary are living in an exceedingly fertile country: up to recent times their district was closed to the outside world for lack of roads, and this prevented them from conducting active trade on any large scale and from selling the surplus

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461 of their products to the members of other tribes living in less favored
251 surroundings. Why should they have worked for things with which
433 they could do nothing? Add to this that their needs have always
487 been so very small that they would not have known what to do with
152 the money that would have been given them in exchange for their crops.

It may perhaps be hoped that the members of the younger generation will be less deserving of the reputation of laziness rightly affixed to the Isneg name, as they have never seen the fat years of their fathers, and so will more or less become inured to hard work. But when the years of plenty are again at the door, will they resist the temptation of resting from their exertions? Civilization is bringing them new needs, and roads are being opened to allow them to get rid advantageously of their superfluous crops: so there may be change.

461 On one of my first visits to Nagbabalayan, I was sitting one evening
152 with a large group of Isneg, old and young, on the porch of the teacher's house. It was dark, and the Isneg were asking questions about sun and moon, about light and darkness, etc. So it happened in the course of the conversation that I referred to the protracted darkness of the regions around the poles, where the sun would not rise for months at a time. On hearing this, a young Isneg man, quite exultant at the prospect, exclaimed with enthusiasm: "What a fine thing! Not to have to work for months! I wish we were living in a place like that". That's the Isneg; how he would curse old Adam, if he could but read the first chapters of Genesis.

152 The Isneg are also very easily dejected in time of sickness, and at the approach of any kind of hardship. The Karagawan case just mentioned would perhaps better have been placed here: it was really a case of utter dejection on account of the terrible famine that desolated their settlement, a thing they had never yet experienced in their whole life.

A few months ago I went down the Apayaw, and at a certain moment one of my rowers inadvertently cut himself with a headax that was lying on the bottom of the canoe: the wound was not at all serious, but the man lost a good amount of blood. For more than an hour he remained sitting in the boat without moving his oar, his face the picture of utter woe and desolation: you might have thought he was in a dying condition. He arose from his stupor and was his old self again only a long time after the blood had stopped flowing. Avoidance of hardship, not endurance, is a part of the Isneg system; hence their poor resistance to the blows of an adverse fortune.

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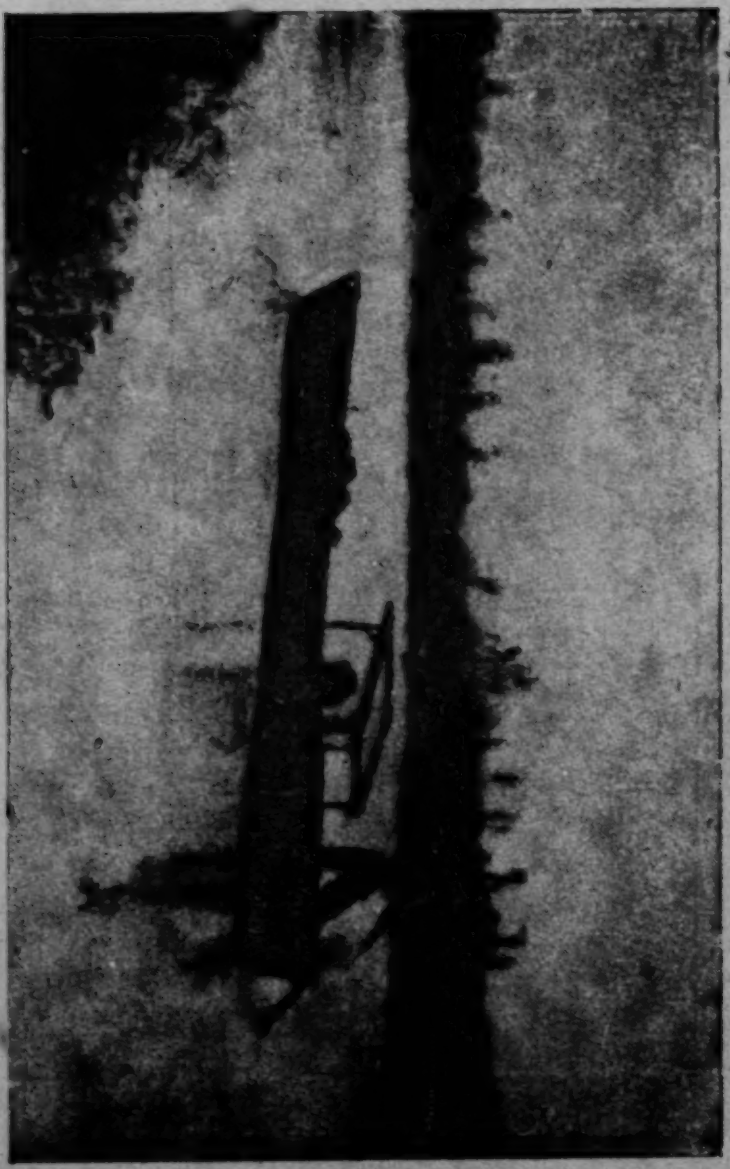

*Apayao River is the highway of Apayao.*

yaos after the principal river in their country. Some say the word Apayao was originated in their fierce battle cry *"Ma-ap-ay-ao."* During this call the hand is clapped rapidly over the mouth so that the cry sounds much like the American Indian war-whoop. This cry is also used at a feast: when a new visitor comes, when the basi is brought in, and when a pig is killed.

I will endeavor to describe, from personal observation of its still numerous cultural remains, something of the life of the Apayaos as it no doubt existed little changed during the long centuries during which their folktales were formed.

The life of these people has much to do with the streams of the country along which most of them live. They do not live on the river flats, but on the mountain sides for safety. Many of their communities are named after the streams near which they are located. A considerable part of the food is obtained from the streams; and they are used for washing, bathing and swimming, as well as for scenery. Much of the transportation is on the streams, and the men are expert boatma nand raftsmen. During the heavy rainy season transportation on swollen rivers is perilous; but it is carried on somewhat. The result is that many a banca has over-turned in the roaring rapids; much valuable merchandidse still lies in the deep pools at the feet of those rapids; and many of family mourns the loss of a loved one. Therefore stories of the streams often occur in the legends of the people.

The people on each stream were isolated from each other for many centuries so that there has come to be quite a difference in their customs and dialects.